PEOPLE FOR
THE AMERICAN WAY
Defending Constitutional Liberties

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PEOPLE FOR REPORT REVEALS LONGTERM ANTI-GAY STRATEGIES OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS RIGHT ORGANIZATIONS

Washington, DC–

People For the American Way today released a report revealing the concerted strategies and messages the Religious Right plans to use in escalating their assault on America's gays beyond the election-year clashes. The report, "The Religious Right's Anti-Gay Campaign of Hate: A Strategy for the 1990s," documents the rise of the anti-gay agenda to the top political priority for many groups, and shows the grassroots tactics they now plan to replicate on a national level.

"Regardless of the November outcome for anti-gay initiatives, the Religious Right will make sure that this issue does not go away," said People For the American Way President Arthur J. Kropp. "The gay-baiting we're seeing in Oregon and Colorado is just the opening salvo of an all-out assault that will escalate for the rest of the decade. Right-wing groups have been looking for a new enemy to build their power and bring in money, and they've hit on homophobia as their new strategy."

The anti-gay crusade is headed up by some of the most powerful right-wing organizations and leaders in the nation: Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition, James Dobson's Focus on the Family, Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America and Don Wildmon's American Family Association, among others.

The anti-gay agenda consists of four major strategic goals:

o **Fostering hateful or fearful public perceptions of and attitudes toward gays.** Despite Religious Right claims of compassion toward gays, they are attempting to pave the way for their anti-gay agenda by engaging in verbal gay-bashing. Focus on the Family compares gays to "prostitutes, pedophiles, voyeurs, adulterers." Beverly LaHaye calls them "people whose sexual perversion knows no limit."

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The Religious Right does not hesitate to exploit public fears of AIDS in their anti-gay campaigns. Former Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, the political leader of the right wing, said in a television interview that "... from the homosexuals, you get the blood supply tainted..." The Traditional Values Coalition fanned fears by warning of "thousands of AIDS-stricken doctors" who may be "spreading their deadly disease right now."

o Driving a wedge between gays and other minorities. Anti-gay forces are trying to cut gays off from protection against discrimination by attempting to deny their "legitimacy" as a minority. Focus on the Family asserts: "Homosexuals are not like other minorities. Researchers think it's a learned behavior." And Rev. Lou Sheldon, an opponent of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, says that "the black community realizes that the homosexual community is a parasite within the true civil rights movement."

"It's a rich irony to see the same right-wing groups who've always opposed civil rights for blacks turn around and try to recruit black leaders to their anti-gay campaign," said People For President Arthur J. Kropp.

o Anti-gay attacks on the schools. Religious Right groups who have long sought an issue to exploit in order to gain more control of public education think they have found one with the gay issue. They attempt to plant the idea that any gay-related subject matter in schools is part of a conspiracy to "influence" or "recruit" youth to homosexuality. Beverly LaHaye calls "value-free" sex education an attempt to "smuggle" the homosexual agenda into the schools. Eagle Forum members in Minnetonka, Minnesota conducted an anonymous phone call campaign against the sex education curriculum for mentioning condoms and homosexuality.

o The anti-gay culture war. The Religious Right is increasingly obsessed with purging any but the most negative images of gay life from art and popular culture. Florida AFA activist Randy Brienen, seeking to stop a gay and lesbian film series at a local library, said gays "seek access to young people to seduce into their lifestyle." Also in Florida, the Christian Coalition mounted a major attack on an AIDS-themed art exhibit.

"The Religious Right's attack on gays has frightening implications for America's future," said People For President Kropp. "It threatens to further divide an already divided society. And it will chip away at values we share, like privacy, freedom of expression, and civil rights."

People For the American Way is a 300,000-member nonpartisan constitutional liberties organization.

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**The Religious Right's Anti-Gay Campaign of Hate:
A Strategy for the 1990s**

"I believe that in the decade of the '90s the politicized homosexual agenda will increase to a much greater degree than it was in the '80s and be a paramount public policy issue."

**-- Rev. Lou Sheldon
Traditional Values Coalition**

"Of all the problems in America today, the homosexual movement poses the most serious threat to families and to our children."

**-- Beverly LaHaye
Concerned Women for America**

The anti-gay activities at the Republican convention and in ballot referendum campaigns in Oregon; Colorado; Portland, Maine and Tampa, Florida, are only the opening salvoes of a multi-issue, concerted, longterm assault on gay Americans planned by national and local Religious Right organizations. This anti-gay campaign threatens to worsen divisions in our society and undermine our traditional commitment to privacy, civil rights and free expression for all citizens.

The Right's preoccupation with homosexuality dates back to the 1970s. But while anti-gay activity was once one item in a roster of right-wing goals, it now commands top priority status among many Religious Right groups. Millions of dollars and thousands of activists are being funneled into the anti-gay crusade.

As the priority on anti-gay activity has increased, so has the movement's strength and political sophistication. Anti-gay activists have developed and perfected a number of hardhitting messages they plan to use to shift public opinion against gay Americans in the next decade. At the same time, they have tested a range of grassroots strategies and are now poised to replicate them on a far broader scale.

This anti-gay agenda, designed to help these groups strengthen their grassroots power and funding base for the decade ahead, is aimed at four key targets:

o fostering hateful or fearful public perceptions of and attitudes toward gays;

o blocking protections against anti-gay discrimination, often by driving a wedge between gays and other minority groups;

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o seeking veto power over schools' presentation of gay issues in sex education classes; and

o censoring any but the most negative images of gays from American art or culture.

Most major Religious Right organizations have committed significant resources to fighting for one or more of these goals. In addition to the Traditional Values Coalition and Concerned Women for America, leading national groups targeting gays include Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, Don Wildmon's American Family Association, James Dobson's Focus on the Family and the Christian Action Network. They are joined by a host of Far Right state or local organizations and such political leaders as Pat Buchanan.

The Religious Right's anti-gay crusade follows the pattern of other campaigns waged by these same groups -- such as opposition to choice on abortion, civil rights, or women's rights -- in its shrill tone of intolerance and its strong-arm political tactics. But the vehemence and sharpness of the attack on gays suggest a profound desperation to find a new "enemy" to propel their cause through the 1990s.

The battle cry was sounded loudly at a January, 1990 conference convened in Washington, DC by Rev. Sheldon, who billed the meeting as a **"national summit meeting on homosexuality"** and gave hundreds of activists marching orders for anti-gay activity. Since then, the anti-gay campaign has exploded at the national level, as well as in communities across America. The most publicized Religious Right attack in Washington has been the ongoing attempt to censor or defund the National Endowment for the Arts because of funding for gay-themed art.

But for every battle that makes headlines in national newspapers, there are a dozen more going on at the state and grassroots level. This report looks across-the-board at a sampling of Religious Right anti-gay activity. It shows that the Religious Right's anti-gay vendetta is not, as its leaders often claim, a spontaneous outpouring of concern about gay issues. Theirs is a carefully orchestrated political effort, with a unified set of messages and tactics, that is deliberately designed to foster division and intolerance.

Section I: Verbal Gay-Bashing

The linchpin of the anti-gay agenda is the Religious Right's unrelenting efforts to stir public fear and hatred of gay Americans. Unless the Religious Right is successful in creating this spectre, they know they will be unable to move their larger political agenda against gays. Therefore, the leaders of the anti-gay campaign are attempting an orchestrated form of character assassination on the gay community.

Guilt by Association. Religious Right leaders, while often claiming "compassion" for gays in interviews with the press, are trying to make the public at large link homosexuality with criminal activity or other abhorrent behavior.

o Paul Cameron of the Family Research Institute painted this pathological portrait of gays in 1990: **"For thousands of years observers have noted that regular participation in homosexuality results in a personality which is a mixture of sociopath, rebel, irresponsible, sensate, hypersensitive, hypersexual and self-centered....The more you cater to disturbed people, the more they want."**

o A March 1991 article in Focus on the Family uses this argument against treating gays fairly: **"There are people in our society who find sexual satisfaction from engaging in intercourse with animals....Would anyone suggest that these groups deserve special protection...?"** They also argue against gay pride marches: **"Communities do not let prostitutes, pedophiles, voyeurs, adulterers, and those who sexually prefer animals to publicly celebrate their lifestyles. Why should homosexuals get special privileges?"**

o In a recent fundraising letter, the Freedom Alliance's Oliver North attacked gays as **"anti-family extremists"** whose lifestyle **"most God-fearing Americans see as sinful and immoral."**

o Former Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan has characterized gays as **"promiscuous homosexuals [who] appear literally hell-bent on Satanism and suicide."**

o In a fundraising appeal in May, Concerned Women for America's Beverly LaHaye described gays as **"people whose sexual perversion knows no limit."** In her pamphlet, **"The Hidden Homosexual Agenda,"** LaHaye argues that gay youth should not be provided with positive role models to help them cope with their identity. **"Are historic figures who were past alcoholics or today's convicted drug dealers elevated as good role models for youth today?"**

o The language of the Oregon anti-gay initiative, authored by the local group Oregon Citizens' Alliance, equates homosexuality with **"pedophilia, sadism or masochism."**

Exploiting Public Fears of AIDS. Despite the public health risk of spreading misinformation about AIDS, the Religious Right does not hesitate to manipulate and exploit the public's fear of contagion. Some organizations are actively lobbying in favor of mandatory AIDS testing, but even more frequently the AIDS epidemic is simply used at another rhetorical tool in anti-gay campaigns.

o Focus on the Family's strategy paper, "The Homosexual Agenda," argues that **"homosexual rights legislation not only promotes immorality in society, but spreads... many diseases."** The paper urges activists to investigate gay groups, to join or form a local anti-gay group, and to encourage their local pastor to preach against gays, among other activities.

o In March, 1991, Pat Buchanan scapegoated gays for the AIDS crisis in a television interview: **"...from the homosexuals, you get the blood supply tainted, you get their wives and girlfriends get it [sic] who give it to the babies, you get the hemophiliacs' blood supply and all the rest of it."**

o A recent direct mail letter from the Traditional Values Coalition contained an official-looking document billed as the **"Emergency National Health Poll."** Among its hysterical assertions about AIDS is that **"thousands of AIDS-stricken doctors across America -- maybe even in your home town -- are treating patients. Perhaps even spreading their deadly disease right now."**

o A March 1991 Concerned Women for America fundraising letter also beat the drum for mandating AIDS tests, alleging that **"[u]nless AIDS testing is made a national medical policy, then none of us...is safe,"** and concluding **"[m]ay God shower down His mercy upon us to stop the spread of this deadly disease among innocent thousands."**

Section II: Driving a Wedge Between Gays and Other Minorities

Perhaps the most socially divisive tactic of the Religious Right is its deliberate effort to deny gays legal protection against discrimination by attempting to turn other minority groups against them. Religious Right groups know that they lost an important battle in this war in 1990, when the Hate Crime Statistics Act, a law mandating federal data collection on hate crimes, included gays among the minority groups covered by the law. But while they have been forced to yield on the issue of hate crimes, Religious Right groups are fighting fiercely to block anti-discrimination protections for gays.

This tactic of defending anti-gay discrimination is the weakest political link in the Religious Right strategy. Poll after poll has shown that Americans, regardless of party or political leaning, react negatively to unfair treatment. But anti-gay activists have devised two complementary strategies designed to counter the American public's predisposition against discrimination in all forms. The first is to characterize gay Americans' struggle against discrimination as an aggressive battle for "special rights," rather than protection of basic fairness in employment, housing and other areas. The second is to assert that gays are not a "legitimate" minority group. In a particularly cynical maneuver, many of the same Religious Right groups and leaders who have actively opposed civil right protections for black Americans are now trying to enlist their support in the anti-gay crusade.

o Both of these strategies have come into play in Colorado's ballot referendum campaign. Launched by Colorado for Family Values, the initiative would make it illegal for any state or local law to protect gays against discrimination. CFV, an offshoot of Sheldon's group, claims that gay groups are **"trying to force Colorado to accept, affirm -- and even subsidize -- their deviant lifestyle." The group asserts that "'gays' want special rights**

for themselves -- but what about the rest of us?" The anti-gay campaign also enlisted Colorado Civil Rights Commission member John N. Franklin to make the legal argument that gays should be denied protection against discrimination under civil rights laws.

o An anti-gay and anti-Clinton television spot produced by the Christian Action Network lashes out at **"giving homosexuals special civil rights."** Using hot-button language used last year to attack the Civil Rights Act of 1991, the ad also attacks mythical **"job quotas for homosexuals."**

o In a March 1990 appearance on the Donahue show, TVC's Rev. Lou Sheldon inadvertently revealed his total unfamiliarity with civil rights history in attacking gays: **"You can't compare yourselves with blacks! Don't you understand that the Freedom Train to Selma and the blood that was shed going for that Freedom Train did not end in sodomy."** (There was no "Freedom Train" to Selma.) Yet, in May of 1991, Sheldon intensified this theme, orchestrating a rally in Sacramento against gay rights that showcased several local black ministers. Sheldon said: **"Very clearly the black community realizes that the homosexual agenda is a parasite within the true civil-rights movement. Black ministers ... are now thrilled that I can work for them."** (Rev. Sheldon was a vocal opponent of the Civil Rights Act of 1991.)

o Among the most **"effective"** anti-gay arguments Focus on the Family offers its activists is: **"Homosexuals are not like other minorities...Researchers think it's learned behavior."**

o The issue of minority "legitimacy" was also manipulated in the Religious Right's effort to force California Governor Pete Wilson to veto a gay rights bill in 1991. (A modified version of the bill has since been signed by the Governor.) Rev. Pat Robertson vowed to a state Republican group in Sacramento that Wilson would be a one-term governor if he signed the bill. The California Republican Central Committee adopted a resolution demanding a veto, calling the gay rights bill **"an insult to legitimate minorities."**

o The minority wedge tactic was also employed in a gay rights battle in Louisville, Kentucky, where the Board of Aldermen voted down an anti-discrimination bill in August, 1992. Anti-gay organizer Dr. Frank Simon said afterwards: **"The black churches were extremely important to our winning effort. Blacks were offended by the idea of extending civil rights protection to a form of sexual behavior."**

Section III: Anti-Gay Attacks on the Schools

Religious Right organizations, long in search of a potent issue to exploit in their effort to grasp control of public education, think they have found one in targeting any educational program that touches on gay subject matter. Their primary tactic is planting the suggestion that such programs are part of some mythical gay conspiracy to "influence" or "recruit" young people.

o This year, the Traditional Values Coalition has launched a major campaign against California's proposed health curriculum on the grounds that it is a **"blatant homosexual ploy to change the culture.... They are trying to frame the issue in a way that is nothing but a recruiting tool for homosexuality."** In a move hailed by the Religious Right as a major victory, the state Board of Education has ordered the curriculum commission to reconsider its guidelines. Areas that might be changed more to the Right's liking include AIDS prevention and other gay issues. A final vote on the curriculum is expected this fall.

o The Religious Right has mounted a coordinated assault on Project 10, an educational program designed to help gay youth cope with their sexual identity. (Federal Department of Health and Human Services research shows that gay youth suffer a disproportionately high rate of suicide.) Rev. Sheldon, a veteran of many battles to oust this program from California schools, compares it to **"inviting practicing cocaine addicts to show teens how to use cocaine...."**

o In "The Hidden Homosexual Agenda," CWA's Beverly LaHaye writes: **"Not only does the homosexual agenda propose to take away the right of those who believe that homosexuality is wrong and immoral to voice that opinion, but it also has and will continue to smuggle that same policy into the public schools by insisting that schools teach value-free sex education. Cloaking the curriculum as 'a comprehensive treatment of homosexuality and gay-related issues,' the fact still remains that the programs being introduced are homoerotic."**

o In a September broadcast of his "700 Club," televangelist Pat Robertson attacked the New York state school curriculum for allegedly caving in to the **"homosexual agenda."** He said of presenting any gay subject matter in school: **"It's like saying we're going to teach them to be pickpockets, because there's a large population of pickpockets and we've got to understand if you reach in here you can get a guy's wallet easily."**

o In Minnetonka, Minnesota, objectors linked with Eagle Forum attacked a sex education curriculum used in fifth and sixth-grade health classes for including information on homosexuality and condoms, arguing that homosexuality is a choice not an identity. Organizers targetted an anonymous phone call campaign on school officials, and succeeded in winning new options in the curriculum that don't address these issues.

Section IV: The Anti-Gay Culture War

In the past few years, the Religious Right has become increasingly obsessed with censoring any but the most negative images of gays in art and popular culture. Their most high-profile target has been the National Endowment for the Arts, attacked for its smattering of grants to gay artists. But the culture war also rages on at the grassroots, with local campaigns to purge gay images from libraries, museums, and television shows.

o In June, a branch of the American Family Association attacked the Leon County, Florida library board and commission, seeking to halt a planned showing of a gay and lesbian film series at a local public library. AFA activist Randy Brienen argued that gays **"seek access to young people to seduce into their lifestyle."** The commission did not buy this argument, however, and AFA lost.

o During 1991, in Orlando, Florida, the Christian Coalition attacked artist Bill Paul's exhibit dealing with the AIDS crisis, calling it **"pornographic and anti-Christian."** The anti-gay group sought to shut down the exhibit, with the support of such Religious Right leaders as Jerry Falwell and James Dobson. The exhibit, which had received public funding, was not censored but administrators associated with it faced subsequent funding problems as a result of the controversy.

o AFA's monthly journal has identified the seven **"top sponsors of pro-homosexual programs"** for a letter-writing and boycott campaign. In recent years, Wildmon has taken aim at gay-themed segments of such shows as "LA Law," "Thirtysomething," and "The Golden Girls."

Conclusion

The Religious Right's strategic decision to mount a longterm campaign against gays has frightening implications for values most Americans cherish: fair treatment under law, our sense of community and mutual respect, and our right to privacy and free expression. It is especially alarming in a time of increasing social fragmentation and division that dozens of groups with, collectively, millions of followers, have made intolerance their top theme for the 1990s. A crucial first step in countering this hate campaign is to make the public aware of the true agenda that underlies the Religious Right leaders' frequent attacks on gays.

Addendum: List of Religious Right and Far Right Organizations

American Family Association

The Rev. Don Wildmon's American Family Association is active in censorship campaigns, notably boycotts aimed at television advertisers and attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts. AFA also helps local right-wing groups in school textbook battles and music censorship fights. Wildmon has formed the American Family Association Law Center, which promotes Religious Right goals through lawsuits and other legal means.

Christian Action Network

Martin Mawyer's Christian Action Network is a grassroots organization that claims 62,000 active contributors. CAN has joined attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts and a range of anti-gay efforts. CAN produced an anti-gay, anti-Clinton television spot released to the press in late September.

Christian Coalition

Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, founded in 1989, "represents Christians before local councils, state legislatures and Congress." They "protest anti-Christian bias and defend the legal rights of Christians." The coalition has 250,000 members and 550 chapters in 50 states. They publish "Religious Right Watch," which documents alleged abused of "religious liberties" and a newsletter, the "Christian American."

Concerned Women for America

Beverly LaHaye's 600,000 member group, Concerned Women for America, focuses on such issues as abortion, pornography, sex education and gay rights. They are fervently pro-life and anti-gay as well as hostile to feminists. LaHaye hosts a radio show "Beverly LaHaye Live," which reaches about 350,000 people on 28 stations.

Eagle Forum

Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum is opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment, reproductive freedom, sex education and substance abuse education in the public schools and child care legislation. Eagle Forum has approximately 80,000 members, and they publish the "Education Reporter" and "The Phyllis Schlafly Report." In addition, Schlafly hosts a call-in radio show on education.

Freedom Alliance

The Freedom Alliance, headed by Oliver North, has over 130,000 members and was founded "to return America to its first principles" which it sees as traditional morality, free enterprise, close-knit families, sound schools and a strong defense.

Traditional Values Coalition

The Traditional Values Coalition is headed by the Rev. Lou Sheldon is based in Anaheim, California. Sheldon claims that his coalition includes 25,000 conservative churches throughout the United States. TVC is primarily concerned with opposing gay rights.